

How to protect your backyard flock from the threat of Avian Influenza

Keep your poultry and pet birds free from disease—through biosecurity—by making sure germs and birds don't mix. Being careful of who or what comes in contact with your birds and where you take them, such as exhibitions and shows, will help protect your poultry and your investment, and insure the health of your pet birds as well.

Infectious diseases and parasites, such as Exotic Newcastle Disease, Avian Influenza, Pasteurella, Salmonella, Aspergillosis and E. coli, as well as parasitic diseases like coccidia, Cryptosporidia, and lice may be spread by domestic birds, wild birds, equipment, bedding, and animal feed. They may also be carried from place to place by people and vehicles. Some of these diseases just affect birds. Others can affect people.

To protect your birds and prevent the spread of disease, develop a flock biosecurity plan with your local veterinarian or the University's cooperative extension agent. The basic components of a good Biosecurity Plan are:

Surrounding birds with a safe border or fence. This boundary should restrict wildlife (especially birds), pests (rodents) and other animals (dogs, cats). Restrict access to people, allowing them in only after they have cleaned their boots and washed their hands. Some of these restrictions may seem excessive, but consider the risk to your birds and what you are comfortable with.

Keeping poultry yard, chicken house or bird cage clean. Make sure the food and water bowls are kept clean and prevent access to them from other animals. Use appropriate bedding and clean it often. Do not allow waste material to build up and dispose of it in an area without wildlife access. Create a pile and keep it covered with a tarp or a thin layer of soil. Wash your hands and boots prior to entering the poultry yard and repeat this procedure when leaving. In larger poultry operations workers generally have a separate change of clothes (work coveralls and boots) to wear when working with

the flock. They will often have a foot or boot bath to clean their shoes or boots prior to entering the poultry house or yard.

Preventing vehicles access to poultry yards. Cars or trucks can carry infectious diseases in the mud-caked tires. This is very important for larger poultry operations where feed, equipment, and fuel may be delivered. Visitors should park away from the poultry yard. If there is an outbreak of an avian disease in the area you may want to park vehicles away from all areas where the birds are housed.

Isolating new birds from to prevent introducing new diseases. New birds should be isolated from the rest of the flock for at least two weeks and preferably for one month. Care and feed these birds after the flock has been tended to. Prior to entering the isolation area clean and disinfect your hands and boots then put on a separate set of clothes or coveralls and cover your hair. When leaving the isolation area change clothes, wash and disinfect your hands and boots. Do not borrow any equipment from your neighbors. If you must borrow something make sure you wash and disinfect the items. Feed and bedding are high risk items to borrow and cannot be disinfected.

Being familiar with birds' normal behavior and appearance. Monitor and report any abnormalities to your veterinarian or cooperative extension agent. A decrease in egg production or appetite may be in response to light cycle or food changes, but is also one of the first signs of a disease. Feces (diarrhea) change may be a reaction to a new food or an infectious disease or parasite infestation. Disease may affect activity levels: birds may be inactive and huddle up, shake or have muscle twitching, seem depressed or lazy, have an uncoordinated walk or gait. The bird's appearance may also be different: swollen eyes and wattles, nose and mouth discharges, fecal staining around the vent, bruising or discoloration around the legs or head.

Knowing what to do if:

- A) **Your birds are sick and several have died.** Call your local veterinarian, cooperative extension agent, the State Veterinarian, or the Federal Veterinarian.

They will work with you on the best plan to determine what is wrong with your birds, how to prevent the spread of the condition, and how to clean the area. You may be instructed to send samples to the Environmental Health Lab in Anchorage for testing. There are many diseases or conditions that can be the cause of the problem you are seeing, but it is best if you do not allow anyone to touch or handle the birds until you consult with someone with experience. If the birds have an infectious disease, you do not want to spread the infection.

B) You find dead or sick wild birds. Call 1-866-5BRDFLU and you will be directed to someone in the area to help with the problem. You can also call ADF&G in Anchorage (907) 267-2257, Fairbanks (907) 459-7206, and Juneau (907) 465-4148.

C) You want to take your birds to a show or fair. Your veterinarian or local cooperative extension agent can suggest precautions to reduce the risk of exposing your birds to diseases and how to avoid bringing a problem back home to the rest of the flock.

Information on biosecurity for backyard poultry producers and hobbyists is available on the USDA website at: www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/birdbiosecurity/

If you have questions or concerns about your birds, call:

Local veterinarian

Cooperative Extension Agent from the University or a local 4-H representative

State Veterinarian: Dr. Bob Gerlach (907) 375-8200

Federal Veterinarian: Dr Mike Philo (907) 349-0125